

HEALTH

What is Intussusception?

Intussusception is a serious problem with the intestine, or bowel. When intussusception occurs, part of the intestine collapses into itself. It folds into itself like a collapsible tube, like an antenna folding up with one part slipping inside another part. This makes the intestines not work properly.

Intussusception occurs most commonly in babies between 5 and 9 months of age. Baby boys are affected twice as often as baby girls. Sometimes newborn babies, older children and adults have intussusception, but it's not common in these age groups. There is no known cause for most cases of intussusception. Rarely, intussusception is caused by conditions such as appendicitis or tumors.

Usually, babies with intussusception vomit and have stomach pain and bloody stools. Sometimes a baby who has intussusception also has a fever. However, these things may not always happen. Sometimes the only clue that something is wrong is that the baby is irritable or doesn't move around very much.

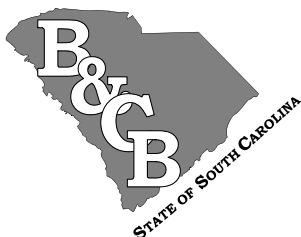
If your doctor thinks that your baby has intussusception, a special x-ray called a barium enema will be taken. A substance called barium is put in the baby's rectum and several x-rays are taken. The x-rays will show the doctor whether something is wrong with your baby's intestine.

In many cases, the intussusception is corrected by the barium enema alone. Antibiotics are usually not needed. Sometimes surgery is necessary to correct intussusception if the intestine doesn't stop collapsing into itself.

Most babies recover completely from intussusception, whether or not they have surgery. Occasionally, complications such as infection can occur if the intussusception is not treated quickly. If this happens, part of the bowel must be surgically removed.

For more information concerning intussusception or other digestive problems contact The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, 2 Information Way, Bethesda, MD 20892-3570 or call: 1-800-891-5389.

SOURCE: American Academy of Family Physicians



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